

Shepherd's Voice

31 December 2018, 11 p.m. and 1 January 2019, 9.15 a.m.

Mary, Mother of God

Numbers 6:22-27 | Psalm 67 | Galatians 4:4-7 | Luke 2:16-21

LOGOS & RHEMA

Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers, as the opening hymn invites us, beginning today, our mornings, our evenings, our lives, are God's. As we come to the end of one year, and as we initiate a new year, we thank the Lord for what is gone by and we praise and hope in him for all that will come.

Today, as we celebrate New Year's Day, we celebrate it in the context of the feast of our Mother Mary – Mary, Mother of God. Mary, in whom God achieved the fullness of salvation, and through her was born a saviour for the world. As we begin our journey into the new year, let us thank the Lord for our Mother Mary, who will walk with us right through the year. We can walk confidently, knowing that she will be there to protect and guide us.

We also believe that we come from the Father, the source of light and love, and we go back to the Father. And so, our journey is secure and safe. Let us begin this Eucharist by calling to mind our sins, and let us place these sins before the Lord, knowing that he will forgive us, heal us and make us whole, so that we begin the year with a clean heart and a clean mind, in his grace and with his blessings.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, I'd like to begin this reflection with a little story. You've probably heard this one before, but I think it is very relevant and meaningful in the context of the message that we receive from today's gospel. The story is about a young man who was on horseback, galloping at full speed. As he went by, an old monk who was walking on the side of the pathway shouted out to him and asked, 'Where are you going?' The young man replied, 'Don't ask me; ask my horse'. This young man was being taken for a ride by his horse. He was not deciding the direction or the pace at which he should move.

As we pass from one year to another, many of us probably reflect and have this experience that everything seems to move but most of us are drifting. The year begins, the months fly, the weeks go by, the days pass, and before we realise it, we will be at the beginning of another year.

Don't ask me; ask the horse. Each one of us has got our own 'horses' that take us through life. The pressures of urban life are many—deadlines to meet, responsibilities to fulfil one after the other, various commitments—everything is so tightly scheduled and we have to keep the pace of life in the world. As a result, we keep on moving and moving, and most often, we don't take even a little time to stop, to think, and to ask ourselves, 'Am I deciding my direction? Am I deciding my pace? Or am I just drifting with the wind?' We often don't know where we are going. We don't know the direction of our life because we have not made mindful decisions. And so life makes our choices for us.

As we look at today's gospel, one thing that strikes us, and it struck me as I read it, were the words 'Mary treasured all these things in her heart'. We see in the gospel that the shepherds went in haste to give the message about the birth of Christ as they received it. They went in haste, in a hurry. Did they understand the message that they were conveying? The wise men come to see the infant lying in a manger, and they leave their gifts and go away. They are also on the move. In contrast to these characters presented in the infancy

stories, the gospel says that Mary pondered these things and treasured them in her heart – very different from the others in her reaction. She heard the word, cherished it, treasured it and pondered over it in her heart. She stopped the race in order to reflect on the Word of God.

What was Mary thinking about? She pondered on so great a mystery – the mystery of Christ’s birth in human flesh. I’d like to read a little poem that describes this very beautifully. Mary was probably experiencing herself as a person faced with a mystery that was too large and too awesome for her to understand. And so, her attitude is to stop and ponder. The poem is called ‘This Mary Pondered’.

The Son of God was born to her;
Would she know what to do?
This Mary pondered in her heart.

The world’s Saviour came as a babe;
What would come as he grew?
This Mary pondered in her heart.

The King of kings was also man;
What trials would he go through?
This Mary pondered in her heart.

As Christ, he would save men from sin;
Would he make all life new?
This Mary pondered in her heart.

Or, perhaps words could not express
The feelings that she knew.
So Mary pondered in her heart,

Mary found not the words to speak,
Not even just a few.
Instead she pondered in her heart.
And now I ponder, too.

My dear sisters and brothers, as we reflect on this attitude of Mary, we ask ourselves: How often do we stop and think and reflect and ponder? Life is going on, the world is going on. Mary ponders, and so she encounters things that most of us would never see, because everything that was happening around her was so very ordinary and she had to look below the surface in order to see and comprehend the mystery of God that was unfolding before her as she gave birth to a child. Mary pondered all these things in her heart. What about ourselves?

Mary saw a little human baby lying in a manger. She looked around and saw animals in the stable. She smelt the stink of the dung. Yet, behind all this was the mystery of God becoming man, and only her attitude of pondering could help her discover something far deeper than what was evident to the eye.

In the gospel of 31st December, we came across the prologue of St. John, in which he says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God’. That Word in Greek is *logos*. There are two Greek words used to describe the word of God. One is *logos* and the other is *rhema*. There is a contrast between these two words, but both dovetail into each other.

What is *logos*? It means the objective word of God. In the lectionary, we find the word of God in print, which is the entire message that comes to us from the scriptures. That entire message given to us, the huge mass of communication from God given to humanity, is the *logos* – the objective word of God. But for all of us, and for Mary, there is also a subjective word, and that is *rhema* – the word made relevant to our lives in

our circumstances. While it is good that we have the *logos*, it is also important that each one of us should ponder and discover the *rhema* – the word spoken to each one of us, a personalised word.

I'd like to explain this with a simple example of a well which is full of water. This large mass of water in the well is compared to the *logos*. When we want some water, each one of us comes to the well with our own little bucket, dips it into the well and draws out water from that huge mass of water in the well. And the water that we draw out and carry home with us is for our personal use in our lives. That is the *rhema*. The *logos* is the huge mass of water, while the *rhema* is our bucket of water drawn from that mass for our life.

This is what Mary was encountering – not just the word of God in general, objectively, but the word of God spoken to her. And for her, the Word of God, the *logos*, becomes *rhema*, when, in her own body, in her own flesh, the word becomes personal: the Word became flesh and she offered that Word to the world.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is a beautiful description that helps us understand what Mary was pondering. She knew the word, the *logos*, but she needed to ponder, to think, to stop, to reflect, in order that the word would become for her the *rhema*, the personalised word.

Let me give you another example. Let's suppose a man is angry during the day. He goes back home, and as he prepares to sleep, the anger that he experienced during the day keeps replaying in his mind. He feels a deep disgust for himself and is unhappy because he got angry during the day. He is upset and cannot sleep. At that time, he remembers the *logos*. Ephesians 4:26 says, 'Do not let the sun set on your anger'. The words of Psalm 23 are: 'The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want. He leads me to quiet waters, and restores me back into life'. That word that this man would have read at one time, the *logos* that he came across in the scriptures, becomes for him the *rhema*, the word applied to his life in the midst of his anger with himself and with the world around. That *logos* becoming *rhema* to him becomes a word that gives him new peace, new strength, new energy to listen and know that God is speaking to him in the circumstances of his life.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is what the Lord is offering, not just to Mary, but to all of us: the *logos* that we encounter in the scriptures and in the teachings of the Church, and that *logos* must become for each one of us the *rhema*, the personalised word. We need to ponder on the *logos* in order to discover the *rhema* for us. What is God saying to me in my life context, in my difficulties, in my search, in my anxiety?

It is customary to make resolutions on New Year's Day, many of which are broken by the second day. I would suggest that we make only one resolution today: that every day, we spend ten to fifteen minutes in prayer and silence, not saying anything, but listening to God as the *logos* is spoken to us in the context of our personal life. We apply the *logos* to our life and it becomes *rhema* for each of us. Let this be our experience, like Mary, not just today, not just for one day, but for every day of the year 2019. If we make it a daily practice to come to the well of God's *logos* and draw out the *rhema*, we will have discovered a new strength in our lives: the word become flesh for each one of us, like the Word became flesh in Mary – the *logos* became *rhema*, and this *rhema* became the word given to the world for its salvation. It will be the *logos* given for us for our own salvation, our own peace, our own strength, our own joy, and every day, we will have tapped a source of energy in God's word become flesh in our lives, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As we begin the new year, we are assured that we do not walk into the year alone, but that the Father—the source of life—will walk with us, and he will give us his word and make it relevant in our own lives. And so we can enter into the new year with confidence and courage as we pray, Our Father...

Sign of Peace

On this new year's day, let us turn towards each other and with a smile on our face, and let us joyfully offer each other God's presence and God's peace.

Holy Communion

As we pass from one year to the other, we will be receiving the Lord Jesus, who will walk with us right through the year, strengthening us, giving us hope, courage and joy every day. Let us thank the Lord who will come to us in Holy Communion just at the stroke of midnight.

Final Blessing

On behalf of the parish team and the sisters of the two communities—St. Mary's and the Carmelite convent—I'd like to extend to you a very warm, blessing-filled new year. Our prayer is that the blessings that we receive from the Lord today at this Eucharist may continue right through the year, so that we experience that God walks with us and supports us as we journey through life. We wish you a very happy new year. God bless you, God bless your homes, God bless the communities in which you live, God bless also our neighbourhood with people of other faiths. May our parish be blessed, may our community be blessed, may our country and the world be also blessed by the Lord.

The Lord be with you.
And with your spirit.

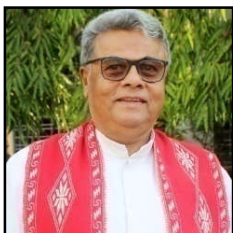
Bow your heads and pray for God's blessings.

As we pass into the new year, may God, the source and origin of all blessing, grant you grace, pour out his blessing in abundance, and keep you safe from harm throughout the year.
Amen.

May he give you integrity in the faith, endurance in hope, and perseverance in charity with holy patience to the end.
Amen.

May he order your days and your deeds in his peace, grant your prayers in this and in every place, and lead you happily to eternal life.
Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on us and remain with us for ever.
Amen.



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church